



DATE: February 7, 2023  
TO: Human Services Committee  
FROM: Ben Shaiken, Director of Government Relations, The Alliance  
RE: H.B. 5321 An Act Establishing a State Ombudsman's Office for Behavioral Healthcare Coverage.

Good morning Senator Lesser, Representative Gilchrest, Senator Seminara, Representative Case and members of the Human Services Committee.

My name is Ben Shaiken, Director of Government Relations at the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance (The Alliance). The Alliance is the statewide association of community nonprofits. Community nonprofits provide essential services in every city and town in Connecticut, serving half a million people in need and employing 117,000 people across the State. They are an important part of what makes Connecticut a great place to live and work and an important piece of our economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony **in support of H.B. 5321 An Act Establishing a State Ombudsman's Office for Behavioral Healthcare Coverage.** Establishing this ombudsman would be an important step forward to ensuring that Connecticut's behavioral health providers, including the nonprofits that provide Connecticut's community-based behavioral health system, are being adequately compensated for services. Making sure that providers are paid what they are owed by the state and commercial insurers will also help ensure access to crucial behavioral health services for Connecticut residents.

Community nonprofits provide behavioral health services—mental health and substance abuse treatment—to people across Connecticut. Their missions and their contracts with the State, require that they serve all clients and provide them the care they need, regardless of their ability to pay. This means that when a commercial insurer denies a claim or when a consumer cannot afford their high deductible, the nonprofit delivers the services anyway without being paid for them by a person's insurance. After years of state budget cuts, community nonprofit providers are already under pressure and underfunded. They cannot afford to continue subsidizing private insurance plans that will not pay for care, and the State should enforce penalties for wrongful claim denials.

The Departments of Mental Health and Addiction Services and Children and Families both provide limited grant funding to cover the cost of care to people who are uninsured or under-insured. If more commercial insurance plans paid for the behavioral health services their customers need, the more this grant funding could be used to pay for people experiencing real gaps in coverage. In some cases, the State is footing the bill to pay through grants for treatment that should be covered by insurance.

A Behavioral Health Coverage Ombudsman would help solve these problems. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.